1: Jenness--222
116, 538

(1913-16) 1922

Copper Eskimo

"Singing and dancing are the main distractions of the Eskimos. Short stories are sometimes narrated, chiefly in the dance-houses during the winter, but the Copper Eskimos have not the same passion for them as the natives farther west."

5: Jenness--1 (1913-16) 1924 Copper Eskimo
116, 538

"Even a surface examination will show that there is a great difference in the tales from the two regions. [AW: Alaska and the Copper Eskimo region] The Alaskan stories are more sophisticated, as a rule; they are longer and more detailed, and have a definite beginning and ending. The various incidents, too, are placed in their proper setting with just the descriptive touches required to give them an air of reality. The Copper Eskimo tales, on the other hand, have the appearance of disjointed fragments without any setting, and lacking both beginning and ending. They were never told straightforwardly, as in Alaska, but had to be drawn out of the natives piecemeal, word by word and sentence by sentence, with many repetitions and digressions by way of explanation. The English translations tend to gloss over their crude and disjointed character, which is far more noticeable in the original Eskimo.

This difference in the tales from the two regions seems to have its origin in a difference of mentality. In Alaska story-telling is one of the most favourite pastimes wherever three or four natives are gathered together, especially in the long evenings of winter. The old tales and traditions are repeated again and again in semi-stereotyped forms to never-wearying audiences, until they become almost as familiar to the young men of twenty as they are to the old men of fifty and sixty years. There are special 'raconteurs,' men who are famous for their knowledge of the old tales and traditions, and these men are welcomed in every household. Many of the stories are so long that

two or three evenings are required for their narration.

Among the Copper Eskimos, on the other hand, there appears to be very little interest in the old traditions. A shaman will occasionally refer to some story in the dance-house, and those natives who are ignorant of it will be enlightened by their neighbours; but for the most part the traditions are told by the parents to their children, or by a hunter to his companions, on various odd occasions, without any special cause or ceremony. There are no professional story-tellers, and no prestige to be gained by a knowledge of the old traditions. Consequently a man may live to old age and die without ever learning more than a half a dozen of the tales that have been handed down by his forefathers. Many natives seem to have a smattering of a few stories without knowing one of them perfectly."

5: Jenness--2A (1913-16) 1924 Copper Eskimo
116, 538

"The original stock of mythological tales and traditions that were the inheritance of the Eskimo race before its diffusion has probably undergone more change in Alaska than among the eastern tribes, partly by reason of the contact that the Alaskan Eskimos have had with the Indians of the interior and with the Ural-Altaic races of northeast Siberia, partly also owing to the very passion of the Alaskan natives for stories, a passion that has led to the creation amongst them of a vast wealth of romantic tales and pseudo-historial traditions of which we have as yet only a fragmentary knowledge. It is unfortunate that no large collection of tales has been published from the Mackenzie river Eskimos, so that we could discover whether the same development has taken place in that region also. In Coronation gulf, as I have already mentioned, the mine of mythological lore is very much poorer. The tales that are current there show a far greater affinity with the tales recorded from Hudson bay and Baffin land than with those of Alaska; they seem to indicate that the Copper Eskimos have had closer relations with the tribes south-east of them than with those to the west. A list of the mythological themes common to the various regions would make this point clear, but I have not considered it worth while to attempt such a list for a small and isolated portion of the American continent, and folk-lorists have not as yet compiled a systematic and comprehensive list that would embrace a wider area."

5: Jenness-2A (1913-16) 1924 Copper Eskimo
116, 538

"No distinctions are made by the Eskimos, as far as I am aware, in the types of stories that are current among them; all alike bear the same name, on pkat, from Point Hope in North Alaska to as far east as Coronation gulf. It is very difficult to say how far they are regarded as true records of past events. The more sophisticated Eskimos of Alaska appeared to consider the animal stories somewhat in the light of fairy-tales, but they still retained an absolute belief in those that recounted shamanistic miracles or the activities of ghosts and other supernatural beings. Among the Copper Eskimos, on the other hand, all the tales seemed to be regarded as equally true."

5: Jenness-2A (1913-16) 1924 Copper Eskimo
116, 123, 538

"It is possible of course that the sketchiness and incompleteness of the Copper Eskimo mythology is rather more pronounced in this collection than it should be, owing to the difficulty I experienced in inducing the natives to impart their knowledge. Even those Eskimos with whom I had lived in the closest association for over a year were reluctant to tell me anything for fear that their fellow-countrymen might disapprove. Towards the end of our stay, indeed, as more natives became gradually involved, they were more communicative, and their reluctance will doubtless rapidly disappear with the influx of white men and western natives into their territory. It may then be found that the traditions known to these Eskimos are considerably more numerous and complete than would appear from this collection."

11: Stefansson--252-255 (1908-1912) 1913 Copper Eskimo
116, 538, 825, 177

"We had here a striking example of how easy it is to be misled by native information. I had been led to believe in the spring that the [253] Coronation Gulf people never had had any knowledge of the killing of bow-head whales, although they were familiar with the carcasses of those that had drifted up on their beaches. Neither had they apparently ever seen a live one, which is not strange, considering the two facts that bow-head whales are not only no doubt very rare in these waters, but the people themselves are always inland in the summer time and are therefore not in a position to see the whales even if they might come into these waters in July or August. But here at this village and now for the first time, after vain inquiries all summer, we heard various stories of whale killings, most of them, however, centering about a single man whom they called Kaplavinna. They told how this person had a very large boat. This again was new information, for up to that time we had heard nothing about anything but kayaks. In the spring, in fact, the people had seemed to be unfamiliar with the very name of umiak.

I listened to several of these stories with great wonder and asked many questions which were readily answered, but which threw no great light on the subject, until it occurred to me to ask one of the narrators, 'Who told you this story? Did you get it from your father?' The man said: 'No, I got it from Natjinna.' Now Natjinna had been a camp follower of ours all summer, and I had asked him specifically in the spring both about bow-head whales and umiaks and he knew nothing about either. It seemed

strange to me that Natjinna should have misled me so in the summer, and I made up my mind to take him to task for it when I saw him. Two or three weeks later, when I happened to meet him, I asked how was it that in the spring he had been unwilling to tell me anything about whales or big boats and now he told long stories to others about them. 'Oh, but those were the stories that Natkusiak told me,' he answered.

It turned out on investigation that my own man, Natkusiak, was the fountainhead of all these stories, and that the redoubtable whaler Kaplavinna was none other than Natkusiak's former enployer, Captain Leavitt of the steamer whaler Narwhal. These were the local versions, changed to fit the circumstances and geography of Coronation Gulf, and translated into terms comprehensible to the Coppermine Eskimo. I had heard Natkusiak telling these stories the [254] previous spring, but the versions that came to me a year later were so changed that they were not recognizable, and had been so thoroughly localized graphically that the narrators could tell me off just which Coronation Gulf headland the adventures had taken place.

When Natkusiak told these stories, as I noticed on many occasions, he never made any allowances for the fact that he was dealing with things entirely strange to the local people. He discussed davits, masts, sails, anchors, harpoon guns, dynamite bombs, the price of whalebone and the like, exactly as he would have done in his own home village at Port Clarence where these are all familiar topics and matters of everyday conversation. The very names of these things as well as the concepts behind them were

absent from the vocabularies and the minds of the local people, and the ideas which they therefore got from Natkusiak's truthful stories were very far from those which have been gained from the same narratives by a people whose everyday experiences made them comprehensible.

From the seeds sown here by Natkusiak there had grown up a local myth about Kaplavinna and his whaling adventures, --a myth which Natkusiak himself would have had fully as much trouble as I in recognizing, ---just as exactly as the discussion of the Christian religion by a missionary and of a strange social and political system by a school teacher gives rise to the most astounding ideas in the minds of the Alaskan Eskimo....

Another story which we picked up at this time was that of the Imnait. There were vague and mysterious animals living in an unknown land to the west, which is also inhabited by the Kiligavait. This story did not give us nearly so much trouble in identifying it as did that of Kaplavinna, for the name of the monster was a correct reproduction of that used by my own Eskimo in the previous year in telling their adventures in mountain sheep hunting. Mountain sheep, of course, are found nowhere east of the Mackenzie River, and could not, therefore, be directly known to the Coronation Gulf Es- [255] kimo. These people were also unfamiliar with the dangers involved in the possible snow-slides and other peculiar conditions of mountain hunting.

They had received from Natkusiak the general idea that mountain sheep hunting was dangerous, and being unable to ascribe any danger to the mountains as such, they had transferred the dangerousness of the snow-slides and precipices to the sheep themselves; and the hairbreadth escapes from death in snow-slides which Natkusiak had described became in their version hairbreadth escapes from the teeth and claws of the ferocious mountain sheep. The kiligavait, which they had associated with the mountain sheep in these narratives, were nothing but the mammoth, known to all branches of Eskimo race by name at least, and known here also, according to what we were told by they occasional finding of their bones. Of course, Natkusiak had told nothing about mammoth hunting, but the mysterious mountain sheep naturally allied themselves in their minds with the also mysterious mammoth, and were therefore to be coupled together in recounting the same adventures. Thus we had a side-light, not only upon the origin of myths among primitive people, but also upon the startling rapidity with which they grow and change their form."